United Nations E/CN.9/2012/NGO/9

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
7 February 2012

Original: English

Commission on Population and Development
Forty-fifth session
23-27 April 2012
Item 4 of the provisional agenda*
General debate on national experience in population matters: adolescents and youth

Statement submitted by World Youth Alliance, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* E/CN.9/2012/2.

12-22497 (E) 280212

Please recycle

Statement

The World Youth Alliance is a global coalition of young people promoting the dignity of the human person in policy and culture, and building solidarity between young people of developing and developed countries. As a global coalition of young people, the World Youth Alliance especially welcomes the theme of the forty-fifth session of the Commission on Population and Development, "Adolescents and youth", and looks forward to the general discussion and outcome documents of this session.

In today's world, there are more adolescents and youth than ever before. According to the United Nations Population Fund publication entitled *Framework for Action on Adolescents and Youth: Opening Doors with Young People: 4 Keys*, in developing countries, one third to one half of the population is under 20 years old. The health, well-being and education of adolescents, defined as those persons aged 10 to 19, and youth, defined as those persons aged 15 to 24, are critical for development. Young people are an invaluable resource for development because of their capacity for innovation. Their place as the world's future human resources and as the next generation of leaders and decision makers stresses the need for investment in their future.

As we seek to address the issues facing adolescents and youth, it is imperative that we keep in mind the needs and rights of adolescents and youth outlined in the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development. We must also centre all of our population and development policies on the dignity of the human person and what is needed for genuine human flourishing. Person-centred development recognizes that human beings have inherent worth that is not dependent on a particular time, place or situation in society. The freedom proper to the human person cannot be compromised for economic goals, no matter how laudable. Human beings are the objects of sustainable development and economic prosperity, and all population and development policies must be oriented around this principle. We invite persons at all levels of society to use their creativity, skills and resources to create the necessary environment for authentic development.

Education and employment opportunities

As a consequence of poverty and the associated absence of adequate health care, education and employment opportunities, much of the creative potential of young people is lost. Approximately 87 per cent of youth live in developing countries. Youth constitute around 40 per cent of the world's unemployed people. Youth literacy rates are below 80 per cent in some parts of Africa and Asia. Today, millions of adolescents, particularly girls, face the prospect of incomplete education, which increases their chances of living in poverty and of contracting infectious diseases.

Education is a foundational element of ensuring the health of and economic opportunities for adolescents and youth. The goal of education must be to help people recognize their dignity and equip them with the necessary tools to exercise their potential. When every member of a population is aware of how their education contributes to development, they will be able to fulfil their responsibility in society. Girls in particular must have access to education.

The growing populations of the developing world stand in stark contrast to the struggle of developed countries to reach population replacement levels. Population growth brings with it tremendous promise for the developing world, given that the human person's capacity for innovation is the driver of development. However, to maximize the benefits of a growing population, sufficient employment and vocational training opportunities must exist. The increasingly younger populations in the developing world create a potential workforce that struggles to find employment in difficult economic times. Youth employment contributes to social and economic stability. Vocational training for adolescents and youth is therefore essential. Vocational training, both informal and formal, brings youth into the formal sector and creates new employment opportunities for them. States must also address and promote youth employment in their national development policies and programmes, focusing on decent work and the elimination of child labour.

The family

The World Youth Alliance affirms that the fundamental group unit of human society is the family, where young people learn to live in genuine freedom and solidarity. Although the State has the duty to provide access to education, no institution can assume the role of the family as primary educator, because the biological and sociological ties between family members cannot be replicated. It is within the family that children first learn that they have intrinsic value, that responsibilities should be shared and that human beings, no matter what their situation or condition, should be respected. The family prepares the young person to access society and is the place where young people are equipped to fulfil their social obligations. The encouragement and love that a young person experiences in family life are directly related to how well he or she does in school, and consequently impact employment opportunities. Therefore, support for the family at the political and cultural levels is essential in recognizing and promoting the rights of young people.

Sexual and reproductive health

Early pregnancy involves higher risks of serious pregnancy and childbirth complications, owing to the lack of bodily maturity. Young mothers are also less likely to access appropriate nutrition and appropriate health care during and after pregnancy, leading to poor health outcomes for their children. Early pregnancy and childbearing are often impediments to improvements in the educational, economic and social status of women in all parts of the world. In developed and developing countries, the trend towards early sexual experience undermines efforts to fight HIV and other sexually transmitted infections. Early and forced marriage, as well as early sexual debut, particularly for girls, hampers access to education.

The World Youth Alliance stresses that, given such problems, educating adolescents and youth about their sexual and reproductive health is essential. Sexual and reproductive health education that is life-affirming, person-centred and evidence-based equips young people with the tools they need in order to know their bodies and make responsible decisions. Furthermore, age-appropriate education is essential; education for a 10-year-old girl is necessarily different from that for a 20-year-old man. This age-appropriate education must begin at home, and reproductive health education outside the home must take into account parents' rights and responsibilities in accordance with paragraph 11.24 of the Programme of

Action. Sexual and reproductive health education must also teach boys and young men about their domestic and child-rearing responsibilities and focus on life-planning skills and healthy and responsible lifestyle decisions.